

**SAN DIEGO COUNTY JUVENILE JUSTICE COMMISSION**  
**POLINSKY CHILDREN'S CENTER**  
**INSPECTION REPORT**  
**2008 inspection; completed in July 2009**

**Facility Name:** POLINSKY CHILDREN'S  
CENTER

**Inspection date:** 07-01-2009  
**Last Inspection Date:** 12-14-07

**Superintendent:**  
**Address:** Cathi Palatella, Asst. Deputy Dir.  
9400 Ruffin Court  
San Diego, CA 92154

**Telephone Number:** (858) 514-4601  
**Fax:** (619) 514-4619

**Type of Facility:** Shelter Care

**Presiding Juvenile Court Judge:**  
Honorable Susan Huguenor

**Staff Interviewed:** Cathi Palatella, Asst. Deputy Dir.  
Carol St. Cook, CWS Manager  
Tuan Phan, CWS Manager  
Alberto Borboa, CWS Manager  
Greg Watson, CWS Manager  
Adrian Camacho, RCW Trainer

**Commission Inspection Team:**  
Sandy Keaton  
Charlie Cleaves

**Juvenile Justice Commission Chair:** Jessica St. Clair  
**Telephone Number:** (858) 694-4422

**Major Concerns and Recommendations:**

The Polinsky Children's Center (PCC) is child-centered, with a structural design that is non-institutional, warm, inviting, and cheerful. The following concerns were discussed with the staff and are also noted in their business plan:

1. Continue efforts, including collaborating with Probation, Health and Human Services Behavior Health System to identify effective strategies in working with the "change-of-placement" youth.

**Comments:**

PCC staff should be commended for instituting policy to divert children within the first 23 hours who have an alternative placement. Additionally, the number of AWOLs has decreased substantially during the past three years, from 224 in FY 05-06, 169 in FY 06-07, to 113 in FY 07-08. The majority of these AWOLs are change-of-placement (COP) youth who present with multiple issues, have had contact with the juvenile justice system, and require intensive services.

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**SINCE THE LAST INSPECTION INDICATE:**

**Number of Suicides:** 0

**Number of Attempted Suicides:** 1 Suicide Attempt / 25 self-harming incidents

**Number of Deaths from other causes:** 0

**Number of AWOLs:** 217 unduplicated

**Number of Attempted Escapes:** 138 unduplicated

**Local Inspections:**

Community Care Licensing	4/13/2009
Fire Marshal	7/31/2009
Department of Environmental Health	9/15/2008

**Other Inspections:**

National School Lunch Program audit	9/16/2008
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**Date of Last Fire Drill:** 4/15/2009. There is a facility-wide drill held once per month and each unit holds a fire drill once per month.

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

**Has the facility exceeded capacity since the last inspection?**

No. In fact, there has been a concerted effort to utilize early assessments that decrease the time a child is held at Polinsky when other viable options are available. The capacity for the facility is 204, and in FY 07-08, the average daily population was 58 (range 41-83). This average was down from 66 in FY 06-07 and 119 in FY 05-06. This decrease is also reflected in the average length of stay, which was 12 days (range 6-16) in FY 07-08, 13 days in FY 06-07, and 19 days in FY 05-06.

**Does the facility house minors under Section 601 Welfare & Institutions Code? If yes, are 601s separated from 602s?**

No.

**STAFFING**

**Staff to Child Ratio – Awake and Sleeping:**

The FY 07-08 budget for PCC included 255 full-time-equivalent positions. The staff-to-child ratio varies by age group and complies with AB 1197 and Community Care Licensing requirements. Babies and Toddlers the ratio is 1:3, and Latency (6-9 years old), Junior (10-12 years old), and Teen (13-18 years old) the ratio is 1:6. PCC also relies on Temporary Agency Staff to supplement regular staff when needed. In addition, Enhanced Child Supervision provides additional supervision for those children who have special needs or whose behavior may place them at risk of harming themselves or others while at PCC. It is important to note that PCC's FY 08-09 budget staff level is intended to serve an average daily population of 50.

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**Communication in Language minor can understand?**

As in other years, youth brought to PCC represent a wide range of ethnicities. In FY 07-08 youth represented 29 different ethnicities, with the greatest percentage being Hispanic (41%), White (26%), and African American (24%).

**Diversity of Staff:**

PCC employs a workforce that is diverse across age, gender, ethnic, and religious aspects. Some general statistics are: 75% female/25% male; 29% White, 23% African-American, 32% Hispanic, 14% Asian, .5% American Indian, and 1.5% Native Hawaiian.

**Staff/Minor interactions:**

During the visit, staff/child interaction was observed. The interaction observed was appropriate, and interaction with staff in general was positive. Staff seemed upbeat and willing to talk about their work and the Center.

**Staff Interviews – Comments:**

None.

**CONDITIONS OF GROUNDS**

**Lawns, playing fields, blacktop, asphalt, Other:**

Overall, the outdoor condition of the facility was clean, neat, bright, and safe. There are several outdoor playing areas, with modern equipment. During the visit, PCC was putting in sand in the toddler playing area. There was grass and trees in the common area between the cottages and the other facilities. While PCC is an open facility, new curved iron bars were recently added to the cement fence to make it more difficult for youth to jump over in effort to deter AWOLs.

**EXTERIOR OF BUILDINGS**

**General condition, Paint, Roof, Drains/Gutters, Other:**

In general, the exterior appeared to be in very good condition. A new Bose sound system was donated and installed so music can be transmitted throughout the grounds, which provides a sense of tranquility.

**INTERIOR OF BUILDINGS**

**Walls, paint, floors, drains, plumbing fixtures, air vents, windows, etc.:**

Efforts have been made to decorate the areas in a non-institutional manner. The walls are painted with child-friendly murals, pictures, child-appropriate furniture and toys. This is also true for the medical facility, which is bright and pleasant. When asked about the ventilation system that has been noted in the past two reports, staff noted that this is a large job and continues to be serviced.

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**Are cleaning fluids and chemicals labeled and safely stored?**

These supplies are maintained in a locked and vented locker in the rear of the facility.

**Weapons Locker location:**

N/A.

**Recreation/Sports equipment:**

There are several, well-maintained recreational areas including the play equipment noted above. There is a pool, a large outdoor green space (or athletic field), an indoor basketball court that is easily converted to a theater with a stage and big screen, a game room and an art room.

**Are the hallways clear and doors propped open?**

No doors were propped open in the building inspected and the hallways were clear.

**Court Holding area (if present, access to drinking water and toilet?):**

N/A.

**Sleeping rooms/dormitories:**

Six home-like residences are currently part of the PCC Center. Each self-contained cottage, which is 5,869 square-feet, includes 13 separate bedrooms, a day room, dining room, kitchen, and outdoor barbeque area. Youth are assigned to a cottage based on age, maturity, sex, and individual treatment needs. There is also a Serenity nursery for birth to 2 year olds and accommodations for teenage mothers to stay with their new babies.

**Beds – Type? 12" off the floor:**

Secure cribs, toddler beds, and double beds are available in the Serenity nursery cottage. Appropriate twin beds are in the other cottages, which were not located on the floor.

**Art, books, personal possessions allowed in sleeping rooms?**

Yes, personal possessions are allowed in the sleeping areas.

**Graffiti present?**

None was seen during the inspection.

**Ample blankets?**

Bedding appeared adequate.

**Study Area:**

In addition to a library, each cottage includes a study area. There were also computers available in one of the recreational rooms.

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**Adequate lighting?**

Yes, there seemed to be ample lighting fixtures and natural lightening.

**Temperature:**

The temperature of rooms visited was comfortable. As noted above, the ventilation system upgrades are continuing.

**ORIENTATION OF MINORS**

**Are minors oriented to rules and procedures?**

All youth who enter PCC complete an intake program that includes assessments and the gathering of background information. PCC is part of a larger process of being able to log into a central database so information on youth in the system can be shared in a real-time manner. PCC also has a 23-hour Assessment Center which provides a comfortable place for those children who are assessed at intake as having an alternative placement option. This is an alternative to admission to PCC.

**Are rules and grievance procedures posted?**

Yes, these are posted in the cottages and dining area.

**Are rules and grievance procedures understood by minors?**

No youth were interviewed as part of this process, so this question can not be answered.

**Minors Interviewed – Comments**

N/A – no minors were interviewed.

**MEALS/NUTRITION**

**Kitchen – Clean; are knives and chemicals locked?**

The dining hall was included in the tour and the Chef was on hand to answer any questions. The Chef took great pride in the menu and providing nutritional, balanced meals. Staffed echoed this, often purchasing a meal plan and eating the meals as well. The kitchen was seen from the dining hall, but not extensively inspected. The dining hall was clean and neat.

**Have the youths working in the kitchen been trained?**

N/A.

**Are meals served or cafeteria style?**

Meals are served cafeteria style in the dining hall or can be delivered to the cottages. In addition, snacks are provided in the cottages. During the inspection, the younger children were receiving their meal in their cottage.

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**Are minors permitted to converse during meals?**

Yes.

**Is Staff present and supervising?**

Yes.

**Is weekly menu prepared? Is it posted?**

Yes, and it is posted in the dining hall.

**Are servings ample, nutritious and appetizing?**

As noted before, the Chef oversees the meals and the meals received good reviews from the staff. The Chef stated his goal is creating healthy and tasty meals that differed from traditional institutional food. Youth are allowed to eat as much as they would like.

**Are weaker youths protected from having food taken from them?**

This is not an issue, as there is plenty of food and all children may eat as much as they wish.

**Length of time allowed for eating?**

Youth are generally permitted to have 30-60 minutes for meals or as long as a youth needs. There are three meals and three snacks a day. If a youth misses mealtime, food is set aside for that youth or a meal may be specially prepared.

**PERSONAL APPEARANCE OF MINORS**

**Appearance?**

The children seen during the inspection were clean, well groomed and dressed appropriately.

**Showers – Frequency, Privacy maintained, Supervised by Staff? Any assaults by other youths?**

Babies receive baths twice daily. Toddlers receive a bath or shower before bedtime daily. Youth aged 6 to 18 years old shower in the morning before school and before bedtime daily. Youth with special needs shower as needed throughout the day. Privacy is maintained by gender separation and under close supervision of cottage staff. Showers and baths are scheduled for each youth separately one at a time in their own cottage as there is no communal shower or bath. Staff stands outside of the bathroom supervising each youth showering alone as the bathroom can only be occupied by one youth at a time. There were no assaults by other youth in the shower/bathroom.

**Condition of clothing – Does clothing fit? Is it appropriate to weather?**

The clothing was in good condition and appropriate for the weather conditions.

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**PROGRAMS**

**Recreation – type and amount each day:**

As noted above there are several areas designated for recreational activity. The recreational program is part of the support services as outlined in the program manual. The program provides daily recreational activity that compliments the cottage-specific activities (e.g. field trips to Balboa Park, fishing trips). In addition, there is an After School Activities program that allows children to participate in activities on the weekends and afterschool. Activities include arts & craft, weights, dances, video games, sports, and talent shows. There is also a Recreation Coordinator who focuses on planning and creating on and off campus events.

**Exercise – Daily schedule and amount of time each day:**

See "Recreation."

**Access to Religious Services?**

Religious services are voluntary and held on-site every Sunday for all youth. Youth under 12 years old can attend on-site and off-site religious services with prior parental consent.

**Medical/Mental health Services:**

The Health Services Program at PCC ensures that all children receive a thorough medical assessment at intake and that their health needs are taken care of while at PCC. Health services are provided on-site (unless additional services are needed) through a contract with Rady's Children's Hospital and the University of California San Diego. As mentioned above, PCC has a complete medical facility on-site to handle sick calls, as well as the initial screening and examination.

The Juvenile Forensics Services' Mental Health Services program ensures that those children with serious psychiatric and psychological disturbances are identified and provided with appropriate care while at PCC. Additionally, the PCC Day Rehabilitation Program provides mental health services while offering life skills training to high-risk children.

**Volunteer Program:**

The Volunteer Program is active and augments and enhances staff services. In FY 07 -08, there were approximately 68 regular dedicated volunteers and 1,717 volunteers who contributed a total of 8,149 hours. They provided tutoring, child care support, recreational support, teacher assistance, and other activities that would not have been available if not for the Volunteer Program.

**Sexual Harassment Classes:**

Yes, provided as part of day rehabilitation.

**Parenting Classes:**

Yes, provided as part of day rehabilitation. Classes are offered to teen mothers residing at the facility. Other teens may receive parenting information/classes as part of the Independent Living Skills Program in which each teen is eligible to participate, and this component is managed by the youth's Social Worker.

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**DISCIPLINE OF MINORS**

**Frequency and type:**

PCC uses the Polinsky Active Teaching Approach (PATA), which is a psycho-educational treatment model developed by the Boys Town and is a nationally recognized model of care. PATA is therapeutically oriented, allowing staff to act as treatment agents. PATA combines social skill instruction with intervention strategies to support staff and the youth served.

**GRIEVANCES**

**Number and Type:**

There were a total of 78 complaints: 62 against staff, 6 against another youth, and 10 "other" complaints.

**TELEPHONE**

**Access:**

There are centralized phones in staff offices and in cottage common areas which are available for use by resident youth upon request and in accordance with court-ordered contact restrictions as specified by the assigned Social Worker. All youth have the right to make a phone call at intake, and are made aware of that right.

**CORRESPONDENCE**

**Is Postage Free? Is incoming and/or outgoing mail read? Is there confidential correspondence?**

Postage is provided by PCC and incoming and outgoing mail is never read by PCC staff. All incoming and outgoing mail to PCC residents is routed through the youth's Child Welfare Services Social Worker. The Social Worker screens incoming and outgoing mail of youth in their caseload due to court-ordered contact restrictions.

**VISITING**

**Is there adequate space, convenient times or accommodations to parent work schedule, etc. special visits? Does staff supervise visits? Is there adequate privacy?**

Parents/guardians of youth at PCC are allowed to have either supervised or unsupervised visits with their children. The individual Social Worker determines who may visit, and restrictions, if any, may apply. The visitation areas (both an indoor and outdoor patio) were recently renovated. While conducting this inspection, there was visitation happening with a child and several members of the family were able to sit comfortably in the visitation room. The rooms had comfortable furniture and toys.

**Have all minors had visits? If no, give reasons:**

N/A.



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**SCHOOL**

**Teachers – Number of full-time; frequency of substitutions:**

There are five full-time and one half-time teachers assigned to the PCC School, run by San Diego Unified School District. The half-time teacher is for PCC Pre-school Program. During FY 08-09, there were 20 substitutions.

**Number of minors attending school:**

All school-age minors attend school, either at PCC, their home school, or other court-ordered school. In FY 08-09, a total of 506 youth attended the PCC School. This figure includes children attending the pre-school program.

**Number of minors in each classroom:**

Class size varies depending on population and can be up to 15 in each classroom.

**Number of minors on independent study:**

None.

**Atmosphere of classroom:**

Since July 2006, the San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD) provides all the education services for the students at PCC. The classrooms were bright, filled with students' works, and resembled other classrooms in schools outside of PCC. The rooms themselves were set off in their own courtyard, were well maintained, and created a non-institutional, positive atmosphere. There also is a library overflowing with books.

**Adequate Supplies? Books, paper, computers, etc.**

Supplies and instructional materials are provided by San Diego Unified School District and meet Williams Sufficiency. PCC also receives donations from the community.

**Activities and coursework:**

Under SDUSD leadership, academic programs are provided for grades K-12. The school is able to gather data on a child's prior school, initiate an Individual Educational Plan (IEP), providing physical education, science, and computer instruction, establish Student Study Team (SST) for struggling students, and provide other support personnel as needed. The curriculum and instruction follow the standards mandated by the State of California, and students are awarded earned credit/hours on a daily basis.

**Homework**

Homework is assigned two days per week for 20 minutes per day to all students.

**Number of minors not attending. Reason:**

A minor may not attend school on a specific school day due to illness, court appointments, or behavior issues.

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**Relationship between the school and PCC staff.**

While not observed, the PCC staff spoke highly of the educational program and the school staff.

**Describe access to school, recreation, and exercise, for minors confined to their rooms.**

No minors are ever confined and attend school, recreation, and exercise. SDUSD has only been responsible for the educational services since July 2006; however, since that time, they have established new goals and objectives to enhance the educational experience of the youth. These include improving communication about the student between educational staff and Residential Case Workers (e.g., team meetings, behavior referral forms, 'nursing grams'), establishment of a pre-school, development of school dress codes and disciplinary policy, and many other enrichment activities.

**ACCESS TO MEDICAL/MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES**

Refer to medical/mental health services above.

**BUDGET IMPACTS**

A review of the PCC budget reveals a conservative and prudent budget process. As such, their budget reflects this decreased cost and reduction in staff. PCC also looks to the Promises2Kids organization, previously called the Child abuse Prevention Foundation, to lead the efforts in procuring private donations and expand outreach for contributions and in-kind donations to meet specific needs.

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